

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 HA-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05 /084 W
-----103820 210336Z /75

P R 210121Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 034
INFO INS WASHDC
AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
USMISSION GENEVA

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INS/CO FOR CODEP (COEXM)

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: SREF
SUBJECT: VISIT OF IRC COMMISSION TO THAILAND

REF: (A) BANGKOK 4870, (B) BANGKOK 4922, (C) BANGKOK 4932
(D) BANGKOK 5046 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: THE IRC COMMISSION VISITED NINE OF 15
UNHCR SUPPORTED REFUGEE CAMPS IN THAILAND. COMMISSION
CHAIRMAN LEO CHERNE CALLED ON THE FOREIGN MINISTER,
THE DEPUTY INTERIOR MINISTER AND THE UNHCR REGIONAL
REPRESENTATIVE. THE COMMISSION CONCLUDED ITS VIST
WITH A PRESS CONFERENCE THAT RECOMMENDED INCREASED
AND MORE REGULARIZED US ACCEPTANCE OF INDOCHINESE
REFUGEES AND THE RELAXATION OF ELIGIBILITY
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REQUIREMENTS FOR THEIR ADMISSION. END SUMMARY.

2. THE IRC COMMISSION VISITED THAILAND IN THREE
WAVES. JAMES MICHENER, ALONG WITH STAFF MEMBER
ROBERT DEVECCHI, WAS THE FIRST TO ARRIVE. MICHENER
VISITED THREE CAMPS: ARANYAPRATHET, KAMPUT AND
LAEMSING. HE KEPT A LOW PROFILE. HE MET PRIVATELY

WITH ONLY ONE MEMBER OF THE PRESS, HENRY KAMM OF THE NEW YORK TIMES. MICHENER ARRIVED FEBRUARY 6 AND LEFT FEBRUARY 10.

3. LEO CHERNE, COMMISSION CHAIRMAN, ARRIVED FEBRUARY 11. ACCOMPANYING HIM WERE JOHN AND THELMA RICHARDSON, BAYARD RUSTIN, MSGR. AHERN, AND STEVEN YOUNG. THE GROUP VISITED THE SONGKHLA BOAT CASE CAMP THE FOLLOWING DAY (REF A), AND ON FEBRUARY 13 MET WITH DEPUTY INTERIOR MINISTER PREM TINSULANON (REF B), FOREIGN MINISTER UPADIT PACHARIYANGKUN (REF C), AND THE UNHCR REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR WESTERN SOUTH ASIA, LESLIE A. GOODYEAR.

4. THE SECOND WAVE SPLIT IN HALF FEBRUARY 14. THE RICHARDSONS AND YOUNG VISITED THE SURIN AND SIKHIU CAMPS ON FEBRUARY 14 AND 15. CHERNE, RUSTIN, AND AHERN VISITED THE NONGKHAI CAMP FEBRUARY 14. THE FOLLOWING DAY CHERNE RETURNED TO BANGKOK AND THE OTHERS WENT ON TO WINAI IN LOEI, AND ON THE 16TH TO NAM YAO IN NAN.

5. THE THIRD WAVE ARRIVED FEBRUARY 16. IT CONSISTED OF WILLIAM CASEY, RABBI MARK TANENBAUM, KENNETH CAUTHEN, CECIL LYON AND LOUIS WEISNER. TANENBAUM LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AND CAUTHEN VISITED THE SIKHIU CAMP FEBRUARY 17, WHILE STEVEN YOUNG WENT TO LAEMSING. CHERNE VISITED ARANYAPRATHET FEBRUARY 19. IN ALL, MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION VISITED NINE OF 15 UNHCR SUPPORTED CAMPS IN THAILAND. THE COMMISSION ALSO SAW THE DETENTION CENTER IN NONGKHAI, AND THE TRANSIT CENTER AT DIN DAENG IN BANGKOK.

6. WHILE A REPORT OF THE MEETING WITH GOODYEAR WILL BE FORWARDED BY A MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION, HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDED GOODYEAR'S OBSERVATION THAT THE CAMP POPULATION IN THAILAND WAS ONLY 47,000 WHEN THE UNHCR BEGAN TO HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF CARING FOR REFUGEES HERE. BY JANUARY 1978, SOME 53,000 REFUGEES HAD LEFT THAILAND FOR RESETTLEMENT ABROAD BUT 100,000 NEVERTHELESS REMAIN BEHIND.

7. GOODYEAR ACKNOWLEDGED THAT LOCAL OFFICIALS HAD "PERSUADED" SOME REFUGEES TO RETURN TO LAOS. THE LAO GOVERNMENT HAD INFORMED THE UNHCR THAT IT WOULD DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THREE TYPES OF RETURNING

REFUGEES; EXPATRIATES (BY WHICH THEY MEAN VIETNAMESE),
CRIMINALS (FORMER POLICE, MILITARY AND GOVERNMENT
OFFICERS), AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC. THE SECOND GROUP
WOULD HAVE TO GO THROUGH REEDUCATION, AND
TREATMENT OF THE THIRD WOULD DEPEND UPON LOCAL
AUTHORITIES. VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION WAS THUS A
LONG WAY OFF, AND IF IT EVER TOOK PLACE IT WOULD
HAVE TO BEGIN WITH A SMALL PILOT PROJECT.

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8. GOODYEAR POINTED OUT THAT US PROCESSING
PROCEDURES FOR REFUGEES WERE AMONG THE SLOWEST OF ANY
COUNTRY. HE SUGGESTED THAT A CENTER BE
ESTABLISHED IN THE UNITED STATES FOR THOSE REFUGEES
THAT INS OFFICERS HAD APPROVED. REFUGEES DESTINED
FOR THE UNITED STATES HAD TO WAIT IN THAI CAMPS FOR
THREE TO FOUR MONTHS FOR VOLUNTARY AGENCY ASSURANCES.

9. THE GROUP THAT WENT TO NONGKHAI RECEIVED THE
PERMISSION OF VICE GOVERNOR SOMBUN THAIWATCHAMAT
TO VISIT THE DETENTION CENTER. THE CENTER WAS THEN
HOLDING 1209 PEOPLE FROM LAOS WHO HAD ARRIVED IN
THAILAND SINCE NOVEMBER 15. DESIGNED TO HOLD ONLY
200-300 PEOPLE, THE CENTER WAS BADLY OVERCROWDED,

AND BOTH SHELTER AND SANITATION WERE DEFICIENT.

10. THE NONGKHAI REFUGEE CAMP AS OF FEBRUARY 14
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HELD 23,486 REFUGEES. LAO FORMED THE GREAT MAJORITY,
HMONG WERE THE NEXT LARGEST ETHNIC GROUP, AND
THERE WERE 337 VIETNAMESE. CAMP STATISTICS
INDICATED THAT 36,004 REFUGEES HAD REGISTERED IN THE
CAMP SINCE IT HAD OPENED, AND 12,516 OF THEM HAD
LEFT FOR RESETTLEMENT ABROAD.

11. THE WINAI CAMP IN LOEI HELD 12,409 REFUGEES
FEBRUARY 15. THAI CAMP COMMANDER WICHIAN PRESENTED
A BRIEFING ON CAMP ORGANIZATION. THE HMONG CAMP
COMMANDER PRESENTED A LETTER TO THE COMMISSION WHICH
ASKED, AMONG OTHER THINGS, THAT THE US EXTEND ITS
REFUGEE PROGRAM FOR ANOTHER TWO TO FIVE YEARS
UNTIL ALL THE INDOCHINESE REFUGEES IN THAILAND HAD
A PLACE TO LIVE IN THE FREE WORLD. ALTERNATIVELY,
THEY ASKED FOR FUNDS SO THAT THOSE REFUGEES THAT
THE US DID NOT ACCEPT COULD GO BACK TO LAOS AND
RETAKE THE COUNTRY FROM THE COMMUNISTS.

12. NAN GOVERNOR SAITHI PONGKEO TOLD THE
COMMISSION OF SOME BENEVOLENT MEASURES HE HAD IN
MIND FOR TREATMENT OF REFUGEES IN HIS PROVINCE.
THE NAM YAO CAMP, ONE OF TWO UNHCR SUPPORTED
REFUGEE CAMPS IN NAN PROVINCE, HELD 13,078 REFUGEES IN
2,365 FAMILIES AS OF FEBRUARY 16. NAN ADDITIONALLY
HAD 108 HMONG REFUGEES CAMPED IN FRONT OF PUA
DISTRICT POLICE HEADQUARTERS, AND 96 LAO FROM ONE
VILLAGE WHO HAD SOUGHT ASYLUM JUST INSIDE THE
PROVINCE BORDER. THERE WERE ANOTHER 21 POST-NOVEMBER 15
ARRIVALS IN MAE JARIM DISTRICT. (SEPARATE
MEMORANDA OF CONVERSATION WILL BE FORWARDED ON
THE MEETINGS WITH SOMBOUN, WICHIAN AND SAITHI).

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13. THE COMMISSION MET FEBRUARY 17 IN BANGKOK WITH
THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS FROM KUALA LUMPUR:
SAMPATKUMAR, UNHCR REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR
EASTERN SOUTH ASIA; JOSEPH GETTIER, EMBASSY
REFUGEE OFFICER AND GALEN BEERY, JONT VOLUNTARY
AGENCY REPRESENTATIVE.

14. THE CULMINATION OF THE COMMISSION'S VIST TO
THAILAND WAS AN HOUR LONG PRESS CONFERENCE
FEBRUARY 18. THE COMMISSION MADE A NUMBER OF
RECOMMENDATIONS IN ITS PRESS RELEASE (REF D)
INCLUDING THAT THE US ADOPT A MORE COHERENT AND
GENEROUS LONG RANGE POLICY FOR ADMISSION OF
INDOCHINESE REFUGEES, LIFT CATEGORY REQUIREMENTS
FOR ALL VIETNAMESE AND CAMBODIAN REFUGEES IN
THAILAND, AND EASE ADMITTANCE CRITERIA FOR OVERLAND
REFUGEES FROM LAOS.
WHITEHOUSE

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Message Attributes

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